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AUTHOR Johnson, Laura S.
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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses two questions: How can newspapers be established as acceptable classroom reading materials in the secondary schools? and Why, until recently, have newspapers been so little used in the schools? Some of the answers provided to the first question are that the newspaper presents a viable means of keeping textbooks up-to-date in many different subject fields and that the newspaper offers interesting material that will motivate students to better reading comprehension and improved reading skills. Some of the reasons why newspapers have been bypassed in the schools are thay many people regard them as unreliable and sensational and that administrators and teachers continue to judge newspapers by what they were rather than what they are today. It is concluded that newspapers today are more readable and more socially involved in readers' lives and that they present the "why" as well as the "how" of the news. Accordingly, newspapers are an inexpensive and popular instructional aid in the classroom. (DI)

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Laura S. Johnson
Evanston High School
1600 Dodge Avenue
Evanston, Illinois 60204

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THE NEWSPAPER AS AN INSTRUCTIONAL MEDIUM

The pinch engendered by inflation and falling tax revenues puts most school administrators and teachers into a seemingly impossible bind when it comes to supplying their students with current yet academically acceptable reading materials. The newspaper, however, costs less than 5¢ per day per copy (one teacher needs only one set of papers, using them all day for all students), and offers, even at this low cost, many fringe benefits for both teachers and students.

The International Reading Association, with its worldwide membership of more than 52,000 professionals, strongly encourages its use:

> The newspaper is the most widely and consistently read piece of literature published. It should, therefore, have a prominent place in the school curriculum. Much can be taught from the newspaper because it contains much. Besides material for teaching reading skills, there are arithmetic problems, science information, historical events, entertainment features, and a panorama of societal needs and challenges.[1]

Education U.S.A. emphasizes the importance of newspapers in this way:

> Students who use newspapers in the classroom become more understanding and analytical newspaper readers than those who don't, according to the results of a test designed by Educational Testing Service of Princeton, N.J. . . . Comprehension of various sections of the newspaper was significantly higher in classes that had used newspapers.[2]

The Newspaper in the Classroom Program has gained a

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great deal of acceptance in the past few years as increasingly more and more schools adopt it for prolonged, as well as short, use. Consider the following rate of growth between the 1966-67 and the 1970-71 school years: the number of students in the United States and Canada using newspapers in their classrooms increased 63%; the number of schools using newspapers increased 53%; and the number of teachers using newspapers increased 51%.[3]

When academic personnel are in the process of considering widespread adoption of the newspaper for use in their classrooms, they want answers to two important questions:

> How can an inexpensive, transitory item like a newspaper establish itself as acceptable classroom reading?
>
> And why, until recently, has the newspaper been so little used in schools?

To answer the first question:

Newspapers are valuable in the classroom for many reasons. One is that the daily newspaper offers a viable, up-to-the-minute printout for keeping any textbook current. The time lag between when a book is written and when it is published and distributed, under the best of circumstances, is usually one year; most often it is two or three years. A good teacher, of course, uses his textbook as far as it will go; but likewise, he often carries on from that point and keeps his subject current by supplementing it occasionally with what's been printed since copyright date of the book.[4] This supplementing, however, must be a constantly recurring process rather than just an occasional one, as it usually is because teachers are pressed for time to cover traditionally required work, and if something has to go, it will be

the newspaper, not the textbook. Our responsibility, though, requires us to use both.

Current print should be checked daily. This is important not only for keeping subject matter up-to-date, but also for giving the student endless opportunities to practice re-structuring what he already knows in terms of what the new item of information does to change the significance of the older items. This is a student's real reason for being in school; he needs the creative experience of combining old and new so that he can produce an extended meaning. If he does not have a chance to work with all of the materials which enable him to do this, he is being deprived of the most basic elements of education. He has always had his textbook; but he has not always had his daily printout. He needs both to complete and integrate his process of education.

When the student reads like this, he is employing reading as a thought process in a manner which will vastly improve his ability to remember, to comprehend, and to synthesize. Let us turn to biology for an example of the importance of combining textbook and newspaper. What the book has to say about the cell is fundamental knowledge which the student must possess if he is to understand anything further which he will read or hear about the cell. But is this where his instruction about the cell ends?

For many students it is. But should it? How many biology high school textbooks have had time to catch up with the findings in genetic-biology? How many discuss cloning?

More important still, how many need to discuss these all-important social as well as biological happenings? Dare we let high school people graduate without finding out about events for which they will need to make adult decisions that could propel them into a grave new world of monsters or controlled thought? Already scientists are sounding warnings about the need for legislation to regulate the applications of biological research. What are we teaching students now about the part they will have in making these decisions?

Another example: How many current science textbooks discuss an item like lunar science? Until the books catch up with what's changing almost daily, students can only read about it in more timely publications. With a space station imminent, with discussion on international space probes under way, with Pioneer 11 speeding toward Jupiter and beyond, can we truthfully say our students are being exposed to what they need to know about their relation to this new world if they don't have access to the print which allows them more time to consider the implications of space life than just the sketchy clips they get on TV and radio?

What about the history and literature books which still mostly ignore the offerings of minorities? How prepared in human understanding are students if they do not know that American Indians like Chief Joseph and Sequoyah were eloquent orator and renowned linguist? That Phyllis Wheatley was a young, black slave-poetess honored by both George Washington and George the Third? How many of our children, acquainted with the ballads of

Robin Hood through our heavily loaded English literature texts, have ever heard of his Spanish-American counterpart through the corridos of Gregorio Cortez? All of these people and many others like them, still unknown to most students in the U. S. because they have been left out of the books children read in school, are Americans. Their history, culture, and contribution to our country have been as ignored as if they belonged to a vanished civilization with an undecipherable language. Really, of course, this America is here; it has always been here. But until the books catch up with this fact, it can be heard, seen, and incorporated into the school curriculum by reading the stories and articles about it which appear in the daily newspaper. Literature (or "English"--not the most popular subject with most students in most schools--) taught in relation to the heroes and heroines in newspaper accounts arouses enthusiasm rather than antagonism.

Another favorable aspect of the newspaper lies in the generally interesting reading it offers high school students. Many adolescents who will not read books, or even magazines, will read newspapers. Thus, reading skills, which must be practiced if they are to be developed, can be taught from the print in newspapers just as well as from the print in workbooks and other more conventional materials. In fact, some teachers say they can be taught better. These teachers cite as evidence of their success the presence of students in their classes. If a newspaper can cut down on absenteeism when a book cannot, they use the newspaper.

Comprehension skills are improved, too, for a student when

he reads regularly and extensively, because his comprehension of new materials depends upon what he already knows when he encounters the unfamiliar. If he doesn't read very much, he doesn't have very much to bring to his interpretation of the symbols on the page before him. So to be a good reader, he must read. Therefore, we must give him what he will read if we expect him to keep on reading.

One of the most outstanding benefits of the newspaper in the classroom, however, is the amount of free help--fringe benefits--given teachers by the newspaper publisher. To start with, most papers can be purchased in quantity by schools for half the news stand price. In addition, the newspaper publisher offers frequent institutes and workshops during the school year which demonstrate how to use his product in the classroom. Many of these conferences offer graduate credit to teachers who take the courses under the sponsorship of local universities.

During the summer of 1972 the Chicago Sun-Times offered a two-day workshop in cooperation with the National College of Education in Chicago. So popular was the course that though applications from 150 teachers were accepted, more than 600 additional teachers were turned away, due to lack of space and instructors. In the summer of 1973, to accommodate this increased enrollment, three workshops rather than one, were offered. Likewise, in the summer of 1972, the Chicago Tribune offered a similar program in conjunction with Governor's State University at Park Forest, Illinois; in the summer of 1973, eight institutes were offered with graduate credit at various locations in Illinois and Indiana. Many metropolitan newspapers offer courses

like these in cooperation with universities and teachers' colleges in their respective areas. In May, 1972, the State Department of Public Instruction for Indiana sponsored a two-day institute for 50 of its Language Arts Supervisors at Indianapolis in conjunction with the Indiana Press Association.

Along with formal instruction like this, newspaper publishers are constantly bringing out pamphlets and monographs on special reports prepared by their staff writers. These reports cover a wide range of topics, around which many school projects center, such as hunger, poverty, mental health, the Afro-American, the American Indian, the Chicano, India, China, Latin America, etc. It is all up-to-date reporting written in readable language and style by professional writers, many of whom have won outstanding awards in the newspaper world. Most newspapers also periodically reprint famous front pages for free distribution to schools; they often have films and filmstrips, too, to loan free to schools which subscribe to their services.

A further indication of the attraction which newspapers have for students and teachers lies in the format which a few conventional textbook publishers have adopted for presentation of certain lines of their product. These bookmen know a good thing when they see it; consequently, some of them have been using newspaper format for several years.

D. C. Heath, for example, with its Urban Reading Program, presents some of its materials in tabloid size, and liberally illustrates it with photographs and text especially designed to resemble those of the press. Charles E. Merrill has a series

on American history which presents actual newspaper reprints of materials dating from 1841 (Westward Expansion) to 1939 (the Great Depression and the New Deal). They say, "For students, reading history from actual newspapers of the day transforms what has happened into what is happening." Along with this history of a past day, too, the student can get a chance to read the comics, the sports stories, and other features of that time. Similarly, the American Revolution with maps, engravings, and interviews is presented in tabloid form by Kubilius and Company.

Several years ago Portal Press adopted the newspaper format and technique in its Springboard program (later taken over by Noble and Noble). The Rome Weekly, for example, carries a story about the fire which killed thousands of people. It also interviews prominent citizens about causes of the fire, and it includes the Emperor who denies having anything to do with it, though he does concede that the fire probably will now permit him to construct a more beautiful city.

All of this adds up to the suggestion that the newspaper, generally ignored in most schools and even banned in some, is now due for a re-evaluation.

Which brings us to the answer to the second question posed at the beginning of this discussion: If newspapers are so great, why have they been bypassed by schools for such a long time?

One answer seems to lie in the attitude most people take toward them. From somewhere--they can't say exactly where or how--people have acquired the notion that newspapers aren't reliable, that they are sensational, that they are too cheap to contain

good reading material--that somehow, there is something subversive about them.

When people feel this way, they are really reflecting an outdated historical attitude that goes back to the early days of printing when the first "newspapers" were only broadsides or pamphlets which exaggeratedly described some unusual event such as a coronation, a plague, a shipwreck, a fire, or a hanging. These little papers were hawked in the streets, often by persons who could not read but who nonetheless knew how to draw a coin out of an eager listener. As time passed, other subjects emerged as being newsworthy. The most potent one was politics, and thus the political pamphlet, later to become the idea of the free press, was born. The political pamphlet really came into its own during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when monarchies throughout the Western world were under challenge. At that time the pamphlet (or newspaper) was viewed as a very dangerous thing. The king was afraid of it because it wanted his throne--or his head. The people, though fascinated by its heretical ideas about equality and humanity, were likewise frightened, for the political pamphlet was almost as thretening to the life and security of the person who read it or listened to it being read, as it was to the person who wrote it. Some of this tradition of fear and doubt still lurks in the attitude people have toward newspapers, unfounded as it may now be.

Another reason newspapers have been ignored by schools is that administrators and teachers continue to judge them by what they <u>were</u> rather than by what they <u>are</u> today. A glimpse of just how much newspapers have changed in one generation can be obtained

by reviewing some of Edgar Dale's predictions about the future of the newspaper when he wrote, in 1941, about what its needs would be in the following twenty-five years.[5]

Among other things, he predicted that the newspaper of the future would be:

(1) More concerned with the needs of its customers

(2) Involved with consumer education

(3) Manned by better personnel

(4) Easier to read

(5) Read by a populace with a higher average education

Time has proved Dale's predictions remarkably accurate. Newspapers are indeed more readable today. They have more pictures; they are more socially involved in their readers' lives; they present "why" it happened as well as "how" it happened. If, after contrasting the paper of the seventies with the paper of the forties, a teacher still thinks newspapers never change, he should go to a library and spend an hour or two with some papers fifty, seventy-five, or a hundred years old. He will come away amazed at the changes which have been made. Today's newspaper has come a long, long way from its humble beginnings more than four centuries ago. But now, as then, it fulfills a need people have for knowing. As such it should not be denied them, regardless of their age.

So it is to the newspaper as it exists today that we can helpfully and profitably address ourselves if we would like to introduce a current and inexpensive source of print into our schools and to our students. Except for a piece of chalk, there

is no other item for school use that is so cheap and yet so adaptable. Once teachers start using it, they do not want to give it up.

And students? Well, they become as grouchy as great-grandfather if by chance their paper is late, or what's worse, doesn't arrive at all because a substitute delivery man left it at the wrong school that day!

Which, in this day of students who don't read, who won't read, who say they can't read, must be telling us something.

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